## CLAIMS

1.    A method, comprising:

receiving (304), at a bi-directional communications device (130), an application level gateway (ALG) file (200);

comparing (308, 310, 314, 320, 326, 332, 336) at least one compatibility parameter of said ALG file with features of said bi-directional communications device; and

storing (340) said ALG file at said bi-directional communications device in response to a favorable comparison of said at least one compatibility parameter.

2.    The method of claim 1, further comprising:

rejecting (350) said ALG file at said bi-directional communications device in response to an unfavorable comparison of said at least one compatibility parameter.

3.    The method of claim 1, wherein said at least one compatibility parameter comprises a header format version (308) of said ALG file.

4.    The method of claim 1, wherein said at least one compatibility parameter comprises a file size (310) of said ALG file.

5.    The method of claim 1, wherein said at least one compatibility parameter comprises a header CRC value (314) of said ALG file.

6.    The method of claim 1, wherein said at least one compatibility parameter comprises a header format version of said ALG file.

7.    The method of claim 1, wherein said at least one compatibility parameter comprises a body CRC value (320) of said ALG file.

8.    The method of claim 1, wherein said at least one compatibility parameter comprises an authentication signature (326) of said ALG file.

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9.      The method of claim 1, wherein said at least one compatibility parameter comprises a hardware family version (332) of said ALG file.

10.      The method of claim 1, wherein said at least one compatibility
5    parameter comprises a software family version (336) of said ALG file.

11.      The method of claim 1, wherein said bi-directional communications device comprises a cable modem (130).

10          12.      The method of claim 1, wherein said receiving step comprises:
        periodically polling a service provider (110) to determine if at least one of a
new and updated ALG file is available;
        sending a request for an available ALG file; and
        receiving said requested ALG file from an access network.
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        13.      The method of claim 1, wherein said receiving step comprises:
        receiving a configuration.file from said service provider, said configuration file
identifying at least one of new and updated ALG files;
        sending a request for an available ALG files; and
20          receiving said requested ALG file from an access network.

14.      The method of claim 1, wherein a firewall program (150) utilizes said ALG files to control data traffic.

25          15.      The method of claim 1, wherein said ALG file (200) has appended thereto a header portion (214) comprising said compatibility parameters selected from the group comprising a header format version (216), a header size (218), a header expected CRC (220), an authentication signature (222), a body size (224), a body expected CRC (226), compatible hardware version family (228), and compatible
30   software version family (230).

16.    Apparatus, comprising:

means for receiving, at a bi-directional communications device (130), an application level gateway (ALG) file (200); .

means for comparing at least one compatibility parameter of said ALG file with
5    features of said bi-directional communications device; and

means for storing (136, 140) said ALG file at said bi-directional communications device in response to a favorable comparison of said at least one compatibility parameter.

10    17.    The apparatus of claim 16, further comprising:

means for rejecting said ALG file at said bi-directional communications device in response to an unfavorable comparison of said at least one compatibility parameter.

15    18.    The apparatus of claim 16, wherein said bi-directional communications device comprises a cable modem (130).

19.    The apparatus of claim 16, wherein said ALG file has appended thereto a header portion (214) comprising said compatibility parameters selected from the
20    group comprising a header format version (216), a header size (218), a header  ·
expected CRC (220), an authentication signature (222), a body size (224), a body expected CRC (226), compatible hardware version family (228), and compatible software version family (230).